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Roberta Harrison
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Harrison

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Harris Church of England Academy

Following my visit to your school on 3 November 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

This visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is at the heart of the school's key stage 4 curriculum.

Context

Since the school was last inspected, there have been significant changes to leadership. You were appointed as headteacher in June 2019. Two assistant headteachers have left. Four new assistant headteachers have joined. A new head of mathematics joined in September 2019 and a new head of English joined the school in September 2020.

Since the last inspection, the Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust Board commissioned an external review of governance. Following this review, the trust board has made changes to governance arrangements and has renamed the school's local governing body. This group is now known as the Academy Governance Committee. The trust board has directed this group to focus on holding leaders to account for the quality of education. A new chair of the trust board and chair of the Academy Governance Committee were appointed following the previous inspection.

Main findings

You and your leadership team are taking effective action to improve the school. You have focused sharply on the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Fortnightly, leaders visit lessons, talk to staff and pupils, and look at pupils' work. You use the information from these activities to understand the difference your actions are making. This means that you know what is working well and what aspects of the school need to improve further. As well as addressing the areas for improvement more broadly, you have prioritised improving the quality of education in the school. You and your leadership team have placed a strong emphasis on developing staff's expertise, particularly in planning and delivering an effective curriculum. Staff value this support. They appreciate your clear sense of direction.

Since the last inspection, you and your team have carefully considered how you want the curriculum to be delivered. Leaders have shared their expectations clearly and have trained staff in how to deliver the curriculum. As a result, teachers are becoming more skilled and confident in their delivery of the curriculum, including remotely. You and other leaders make regular checks to ensure that your expectations are being consistently met. In addition, you have created a positive learning culture. Most teachers are keen to improve their subject knowledge and expertise.

At the last section 5 inspection, leaders were asked to improve how teachers check on pupils' understanding in lessons. You and other leaders have made improvements to this area of the school's work. Teachers now use a variety of approaches to identify pupils who need help or are 'stuck' with their work. For example, in mathematics, teachers make frequent checks on pupils' understanding. They do this by asking pupils to show their answers to key questions on mini whiteboards. Teachers are becoming more skilled in using information from these checks to provide the right support for pupils in lessons.

You and other leaders are taking effective action to develop the skills and knowledge of curriculum leaders. Many have benefited from support from senior members of staff. Some have had the opportunity to work with curriculum leaders from other schools. This work has helped curriculum leaders. They are now more confident in planning ambitious subject curriculums for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). For instance, in history, the subject plan sets out how pupils will learn about important ideas such as 'similarity and difference'. Pupils get lots of opportunities to revisit these ideas throughout the history curriculum. This is helping all pupils to become better historians. Furthermore, your work to develop curriculum leaders' expertise in curriculum planning means that subject plans follow a logical order. For example, in mathematics, pupils learn about index numbers before writing numbers in standard form.

Despite the improvements to subject plans, the number of pupils studying the EBacc is low. This is because the number of pupils studying a language has remained low for several years and shows little sign of increasing. You are aware that you need to take further action to ensure that the EBacc is at the heart of the school's curriculum.

You and your team have also ensured that curriculum leaders understand the purpose and limitations of assessment. Curriculum leaders have redesigned the assessments that pupils sit at the end of each topic. These assessments now have a clear purpose. They check whether pupils have remembered the essential knowledge from the topics they have been learning. This is providing leaders with helpful information about gaps in pupils' learning. Leaders use this information well.

You have taken appropriate steps to reduce staff workload. For example, the number of times that teachers are expected to enter information about how well pupils are doing has reduced from six to three times a year.

You are taking action to make reading a priority. You have thought carefully about how to promote a love of reading. Leaders have introduced several strategies to do this. For instance, as part of tutor time, teachers read well-chosen texts to pupils twice a week. In addition, leaders have refined their systems for checking on pupils' gaps in reading. These checks show that some pupils are at the early stages of reading and need additional support to read fluently. In order to support these pupils, leaders have recruited staff with appropriate subject knowledge.

The members of the trust board have improved various aspects of governance since the last inspection. They have ensured that members of the Academy Governance Committee have the skills and experience to fulfil their roles. The school's safeguarding governor, for instance, has received helpful training on the information that leaders must include in the school's single central record of checks on staff. Governors now receive more meaningful information from leaders about the quality of education. This includes, for example, clear information about pupils' attendance and the implications of this for pupils' learning. Minutes from meetings show that governors are asking more probing questions of senior staff.

Governors now make regular visits to the school to learn more about the impact of leaders' work. They also commission external checks. These have included reviews on safeguarding and how well the school meets the needs of pupils with SEND. This means that governors now have a wider range of information about the school. They are not overly reliant on the information provided by school leaders. As a result, governors are gaining a far more accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

Additional support

You have welcomed internal and external support and use it well. The trust's chief executive officer works closely with you. He ensures that you and other leaders remain sharply focused on improving the quality of education in the school. In addition, trust leaders offer support on practical matters. You value this practical support as it allows you to focus on improving the quality of education. You are also supported by a school improvement adviser, who has worked with governors. This work has improved governors' knowledge of how to hold leaders to account.

Curriculum leaders have received support from a range of leaders in local schools and the local mathematics hub. This support has developed curriculum leaders' expertise in planning an effective curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you. I also met with other senior leaders, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer, staff, and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I reviewed a sample of curriculum plans. I visited lessons and spoke to some pupils. I reviewed the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan and minutes of governors' meetings. I also examined the school's single central record of checks on staff.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Coventry, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Warwickshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Stevens
Her Majesty's Inspector